

The Prahu

by Adrian Horridge

Oxford University Press: New York 1981 ISBN O 19 580499 6

Pp. xii+96, 40 Figs, 24 b. & w. Pls, 16 col. Pls. US \$42.00

Professor Horridge's *The Prahu* is the only useful guide to the traditional sailing vessels of Indonesia that has been published to date. In this fairly slim volume one has a near comprehensive descriptive catalogue of the major perahu (prahu) types, and some very attractive photographs. The book is clearly and logically arranged with a numbered section or chapter given to each type or group of types discussed. The text is illustrated with excellent figures drawn by Chris Snoek as well as black-and-white and colour plates.

By comparison, a more recent publication, *Prahus of Indonesia* (1982) by Hawkins (author of *The Dhow* (1977)), is rather muddled by anachronistic data, personal prejudices and opinions. Its primary value is as a collection of delightful photographs.

Horridge's volume, as excellent as it is, does contain biases and a number of inaccuracies, some of which will be commented on here. Briefly these involve:

1. an apparent distaste for some of the more common and utilitarian types of sailing perahu;
2. some confusion in assessing the sailing performance of boats;
3. the occasionally incorrect use of nautical terms.

One of the first published descriptions of the major modern perahu types is Gibson-Hill's (1950) article, 'The Indonesian trading boats reaching Singapore'. In this paper Gibson-Hill expressed his preference for the most traditional and exotic looking types of perahu. The more utilitarian working boats such as the *lambok* ('Lambok') and the *lete lete* ('Leteh Leteh') were 'on the whole less interesting' (1950:127), and he seemed to perceive that their performance was in some way flawed: 'the Lambok cannot get within 5-6 points of the wind, and it beats very badly' (1950:134). Professor Horridge (and Clifford Hawkins) seem to share these prejudices.

Comparing the modern Butung *lambo* with the West Sulawesi *lambo*, which has a traditional hull form, Horridge states that the West Sulawesi *lambo* is: 'altogether more of a sailor's boat for shallow, uncharted and dangerous waters with tidal currents where the Butung boat would soon be aground' (p.16). This is altogether too sweeping a statement; while some West Sulawesi *lambo* do have less draught than a Butung *lambo* of similar cargo carrying capacity, these shallow draughted vessels usually have very poor windward abilities and are very slow and unsure in stays. These are not characteristics that many sailors would look for when sailing in reef strewn waters. From personal experience I know that the West Sulawesi *lambo* that appears as Plate 3 in *The Prahu* was sold for under \$500 not long after Horridge's photograph was taken. Her former owner then bought a delapidated Butung *lambo* which he patched up and sailed home to the reef strewn Pulau Pulau Tengah group of islands with great delight.

Furthermore, it is suggested that the West Sulawesi *lambo* is a more convenient craft because she can take ground and dry out without legs or some other arrangement to hold her upright (p.15). Yet Plate 3 and Colour Plate C illustrate two West Sulawesi *lambo* that are supported upright; in the first case by legs, and in the second by lashings to a heavy beam.

Some claims regarding the sailing performance of various perahu types are very dubious. Of the *perahu patorani* Horridge writes: they 'go well at about 45° to the true wind ... but on account of drift the boat makes hardly any headway' (p.13). I suppose this means that on account of leeway the boat makes hardly any ground to windward. If this indeed is what is intended, then a *patorani* must be sailed making 30°-35° leeway, a situation that is not really possible. The Butung *lambo* is also credited with sailing 'readily at about 45° to the wind'

(p.68) there is no mention of leeway. If this is true the *lambo* is the most weatherly cargo carrying vessel in the world.

Sloppy use of nautical terms make some descriptions difficult to understand. For instance the *perahu pinisi* is said to have a 'a powerful forestay that runs over both masts' (p.17). This probably refers to the main topmast forestay and the triatic stay running from the main topmast to the mizzen topmast. Again describing the *pinisi*, Horridge comments: 'If any of the jibs has a boom it is the lowest of the three' (p.20). In fact the jibs are never fitted with booms but the main staysail is sometimes laced to a boom.

Perhaps the most curious inaccuracy is in the description of the *lambo* that appears as Plate 4 and Colour Plate A. She is described as having: an 'arrangement of beams across the stern supporting two quarter rudders. Underneath is a sharpended stern' (p.xiv).

The two photographs clearly show a *lambo* with a heavy square counter stern and no sign of a 'sharp ended stern'.

Despite such inaccuracies *The Prahu* is an attractive, comprehensive and concise guide to one of the last remaining but fast disappearing fleets of merchant sailing vessels.

REFERENCES

- Gibson-Hill, C.A. 1950 The Indonesian trading boats reaching Singapore. *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 23(1): 108-138.
- Hawkins, C.W. 1977 *The Dhow: an illustrated history of the Dhow and its world*. Nautical Publishing Co: Lymington.
- Hawkins, C.W. 1982 *Praus of Indonesia*. Macmillan: London.
- Nick Burningham,
Northern Territory Museum of Arts and Sciences,
G.P.O. Box 4646,
Darwin, NT 5794, Australia.